

Hijacker of a Plane vs Hijacker of a Govt

THE story of Pakistan today is the story of two men — former elected Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and the current CEO of Pakistan General Pervez Musharraf. In our eyes one is the hijacker of a plane and the other is a hijacker of a constitutional government.

Pakistan's military has always been self-serving and the present take-over proves it again. What after all triggered the present take-over by the Pakistan military? It was the dismissal of the Chief of Staff, General Pervez Musharraf.

So for us this judicial process begs the most fundamental question as to who should be trying whom. In a technical sense Sharif did commit an unlawful act by ordering a passenger plane not to be allowed to land in Pakistan.

Poor Fire Victims

HOW many people of this bulging metropolis are shanty-dwellers? The answer may not be easy to get, but no one will contest that a large number of the 7.5 million city dwellers live in sub-human conditions at the slums.

The recent incidents of fire breaking out at some big slums rendered thousands of poor people homeless. These tend to show a vicious pattern of greed of a certain quarter for grabbing public land.

We strongly demand that the government form a judicial inquiry committee to probe the matter thoroughly and bring the culprits to book.

End of an Era

AN era ended on Wednesday with the death of Rabindra Sangeet's 'Mohor'. She had been ill for the last three months and her condition deteriorated since Friday last before she went into coma.

The legend that she had become was because of her special style of singing. The Kanika Bandopadhyaya élat inspired many to get into the singing line. Many Rabindra Sangeet artistes in Bangladesh have their 'Mohor-di' to thank for their achievements.

The responsibility is now upon those in Bangladesh who were Kanika Bandopadhyaya's direct students to be her torch-bearers. She is no longer here, but she must not be forgotten.

For a Safer World: Alternative Voices

by Adilur Rahman Khan

The only way to save the people of volatile regions is to immediately build a people to people communication system at all levels and declare an all out movement against a) Militarism b) Communalism c) Caste System and d) Poverty.

SINCE the 1970s, the South Asian countries have shown a growing trend towards militarisation. Despite widespread poverty, these countries have enhanced conventional war machinery.

The nature and magnitude of militarisation can be understood from the defence expenditures of these countries. Pakistan has recently shelved its earlier plans for downsizing military whereas India's new BJP Government is expected to hike its defence spending by about US\$ 1.8 billion.

Similar accidents may occur at any time also in Pakistan. Mr. Zia Mian, in one of his recent articles has given some examples. The Pakistan Atomic Energy Commission appears to be indifferent to the concerns shown by different quarters regarding possible accidents which may occur at Chashma Nuclear Power Plant.

Blind Eye Towards Mishaps

Different reports suggest that neither India nor Pakistan has so far taken any effective precaution against any possible nuclear accident. Various inside reports suggest that insufficient safety manuals may cause accidents similar to one that occurred in a uranium processing plant in Japan last month.

According to Mr. Gopala Krishna, former Chief of the Atomic Energy Regulatory Board (AERB) of India, "excessive secrecy in Department of Atomic Energy (DAE) and inability of AERB to function in-

dependently alone took care of the safety of nuclear installations in India". He further added, "with a captive AERB from which no information as they wish, coupled with the shelter the DAE enjoys through invoking the national security act, we are likely to face a serious nuclear accident in the not too distant future".

Reports suggest that India has had two close calls of nuclear accidents — one in 1979 when primary coolant pipes in Tarapur reactor burst and the other one in 1993, where the explosion of leaking hydrogen blew up the turbine building of the atomic plant at Narora and the resulting power blackout stopped the coolant pump.

In Pakistan, the most militarised regions in the world; it is also one of the poorest. Yet South Asian Governments continue to redirect scarce resources towards building new weapons of mass destruction. Such non-productive investments, in the name of national security, are taking a high toll on human security while people's lives, the means as well as the ends of all development concerns, are left unheeded.

The Jammu and Kashmir Public Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act, the Disturbed Areas Act, the Armed Forces Special Powers Act of 1958 of India, the Prevention of Anti National Activities Act, 1974 of Pakistan, the Special Powers Act of 1974 of Bangladesh, the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act of 1979 of Sri Lanka are all aimed against political opponents or the people who are trying to defend their rights against the repressive systems or political set-ups in Kashmir, Punjab, North-east, Sindh, Chittagong Hill Tracts and Jaffna.

Internal issues have become the issues of more than one state of the region. The struggle for self-determination of the people of Kashmir has now become the common burning issue for the states of India and Pakistan. Armed conflicts in Chittagong Hill Tracts, North-east of India and the Tamil is-

land in Sri Lanka have already contributed to pushing refugees on the other side of the international borders. The Tamil-Sinhala dispute in Sri Lanka has already once caused Indian military presence in the island without any solution to the very basic issue.

The destruction of Babri Mosque in Ayodhya, has added more fuel to the fire. India was put into a situation of communal riots again. Thousands of people belonging to the minority Muslim community were killed and properties belonging to Muslims were destroyed.

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In Bangladesh the Vested and Non-Resident Property Act of 1974 has already contributed to taking away property from people belonging to the minority Hindu community. Apart from this, whenever there has been a communal riot in India, members of the minority Hindu community in Bangladesh have been made vulnerable targets by the religious fanatics and the successive Governments have done little to punish the instigators.

The Tamil separatist movement led by LTTE has already displaced many thousand liberal Tamils and Muslims from LTTE controlled areas and pushed them towards south-western part of Sri Lanka.

South Asia which has either given birth or has acted as host to all the major religions of the world, has unfortunately been put in a situation of religious confrontation by religious fanatics and fascist groups who operate in different countries of the region. Moreover, the states are acting in such a chauvinistic way, that only people belonging to the majority community will be the sole beneficiaries of the state, thereby making the minorities second class citizens in their own

homeland. Human Rights violations under the caste system and organized violence of armed groups belonging to the upper castes have also increased in the recent years. Attacks on people belonging to the lower caste group in the Indian states of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra have increased. In recent years, in Bihar alone, killings by Ranabir Sena (armed group belonging to the upper caste) have been reported in the major newspapers of India. Children are also under constant threat of violence and persecution by armed religious fanatics and vigilantes supported by the establishment.

The crimes of bonded labour and trafficking in women and children cannot be ignored. Along with all these major human rights abuses, poverty is the greatest concern of all and the reason for many of the abuses. South Asia houses the largest concentration of the poverty stricken population of the world. In the name of democracy, 'family' control over political parties and political institutions have made the practice of democracy a joke. In India, Pakistan, Bangladesh alone, the various political 'dynasties' — Nehru, Bhutto, Mujib and Zia, have made party politics and power a thing to be inherited on the death of the leader. Absence of actual participation of the people in decision making processes and lack of participatory approach at the grassroots level has made democracy inoperative. Everything is done in this region from the top. Criminalisation of politics and bad governance have made mockery of the term democracy.

The international level, in 1945 the world witnessed the dropping of atom bombs on two Japanese towns, Hiroshima and Nagasaki by the United States which at the expense of so many men, women and children has become a superpower and has also become one of the founders of United Nations by declaring itself as one of its five permanent members. Other four permanent members of UN followed the same path by building, testing and developing their own nuclear arsenal.

Gradually many industrialised and 'third world' countries, including India and Pakistan, opted for nuclearisation. Many western countries including Germany, Sweden, Canada contributed in the development of nuclear capability in third world countries for sheer business interest, at the expense of the well-being of the third world citizens. Moreover, they have polluted the environment, agriculture and natural re-

sources of many other Southern countries, which are politically and technologically not equipped to resist the nuclear aggression of these western superpowers.

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sources of many other Southern countries, which are politically and technologically not equipped to resist the nuclear aggression of these western superpowers. People of Polynesian Islands have protested for long against all kinds of nuclear testing in their Pacific region, which are particularly carried out by the United States and France. In the name of fertiliser, by giving bribes to some corrupt third world governments, nuclear wastes have been transported or have been attempted to be transported to the third world countries of Africa and Asia. People of Ronchlap and Three Mile Islands are still knocking at the doors of the US courts for compensation against loss of livelihood, their exposure to radiation and the destruction of their home and environment due to nuclear tests done by the government of United States in 1954 and 1979. Flora, fauna and marine life are also deeply affected by continued nuclear tests by the western superpowers.

The recent entry of India and Pakistan into the nuclear club has made the situation worse. "Since 1990, the alarming developments in India's and Pakistan's nuclear and ballistic missile programmes have further threatened to undermine the region's stability. Rather than strengthening each country's national security, full nuclearisation and new missile tests have upset the ability of conventional forces to provide adequate territorial defence, and have eroded the relatively safer non-weaponised nuclear deterrent on the subcontinent. A nuclear sword perilously hangs over the more than one billion people of South Asia." Being in such a situation they have every potentiality to transform the South Asian region into a highly sensitive conflict zone. This has already begun to some extent, dress-rehearsed during the Kargil conflict last year.

Conclusion

The only way to save the passengers of this sinking vessel is to immediately build a people to people communication system at all levels and declare an all out movement against the four enemies of a civil society: a) Militarism b) Communalism c) Caste System and d) Poverty.

Since the enemies of the people are the friends of the power mongers, the alliance of the people need to develop a popular mechanism to frustrate and end nuclear and anti-people technologies for a nuclear free world. To quote a section from Human Development in South Asia, 1999, published by the Mahabub ul Huq Human Development Centre, "The use of nuclear weapons, with their potential for ultimate evil — the mass annihilation of innocent civilians and environment — will become a distant possibility when a concerned and knowledgeable global civil society demands from 'governments' the complete abolition of these armaments and the establishment of a new global regulatory framework."

The author is a lawyer practicing in the High Court Division of the Supreme Court of Bangladesh and a member of Odhikar, a coalition for human rights.

Familiar Face Comes Around on Political Merry-go-round

Although a new Prime Minister has taken up the reins in Nepal, he is an old face facing old problems. For ordinary Nepalis, the question is whether he will tackle the economic drift and Maoist insurgency that are holding back development. Gemini News Service looks at the implications of the changing of the guard.

Jan Sharma writes from Kathmandu

AS the government changes hands for the tenth time in as many years, Nepalis are left wondering whether this was what they wanted when they turned out in large numbers on the streets in the early 1990s to press King Birendra for multi-party democracy.

A decade on, hopes for an end to political uncertainty look slim. And frustrations are running so high that a small group took to the streets recently, urging King Birendra to stage a Pakistan-style coup.

The main beneficiaries of democracy appear to be members of Kathmandu's military-bureaucratic elite — whichever party forms the government, they remain in power and continue to receive their salaries and perks. The net losers are ordinary people, who enjoy the freedom to complain but find that no-one seems to be listening.

Many here are worried that the country is turning into a new South Asian 'basket case', even as Bangladesh — accorded the insulting epithet by former United States Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger — shows signs of economic progress. The elusive political stability typified by the March departure of 76-year-old Prime Minister Krishna Prasad Bhattarai and the late March installation of Girija Prasad Koirala, also 76, has hampered the implementation of free market economic reforms.

When in power, all political parties want reforms to please the World Bank and other major donors; back in opposition, they criticise the donors for exerting pressure for policy reforms.

Reforms are supposed to create income and job opportunities, but can cause short-term pain. So it is easier for officials to do nothing rather than risk upsetting interest groups. Bureaucratic lethargy and indecision have become endemic.

The privatisation of several state-owned corporations, such as the Nepal Tea Development Corporation, has been delayed. Business confidence is low, and investments in new projects are shelved. The blocked pipeline includes important schemes for drinking water, hydropower development and irrigation.

The economy is expected to grow at six per cent during 1999-2000 — up from an average of 3.6 per cent in the last five years — but this is more the result of good weather for farming than of government initiatives. The gap between government earnings and expenditure is

Nepal
Pop: 23m
Area: 147,000 sq km
GNP per head: \$210
Life expectancy: 58(m) 57(f)
Adult literacy: 56%(m) 21%(f)
Change at the top: Krishna Prasad Bhattarai (left) and Girija Prasad Koirala (right)
Map of Nepal showing major cities: Dhangadi, Nepalganj, Pokhara, Kathmandu, Patan, Birganj, Janakpur, Biratnagar.

growing, made larger by the allocation of additional funds for the fight against armed Maoist rebels, who are now active in 55 of the country's 75 districts. They have called for an "armed shutdown" in the kingdom in early April.

More than 1,200 people have been killed in the four-year insurgency in the western hills, and several thousand villagers have migrated to towns to escape the insecurity and look for jobs.

So Prime Minister Koirala has a lot on his hands. "The maintenance of law and order will be my top priority followed by control of corruption and strengthening of the civil service," he said on taking office. "These three areas are in a poor shape. They deserve top priority."

Few disagree. But he said much the same in three previous stints in office, with few results. He won another turn in the top job after 69 MPs, including 11 ministers, from Bhattarai's Nepali Congress party humbly said they had lost confidence in Bhattarai's leadership as a result of his poor performance since taking office in May 1999.

Now, Koirala's experienced and respected Finance Minister, Mahesh Acharya, will have to burn the midnight oil in readiness for the important 17-19 April meeting of the Nepal Development Forum, which groups all the country's main donors.

The meeting has been repeatedly postponed since the last get-together in 1996. Funds have continued to arrive but the lack of dialogue and coordina-

tion has resulted in confusion over government and donor priorities. Donors, for example, favour investment in social sectors, while the government prefers roads, power and infrastructure.

Despite the size of the problems facing him, Koirala's biggest threat could come from within his own party. He beat former premier Sher Bahadur Deuba in a party leadership vote in mid-March and he will have to keep a careful watch on party dissidents to keep himself secure.

Deuba himself will certainly again be a contender for the leadership at a later date, but he, too, has to keep a wary eye on up-and-coming newcomers. They include Sujata Koirala, the ambitious and charming daughter of the new Premier.

She heads a non-governmental organisation, the Shri Shama Memorial Trust, and is active in community development work. If she pursues the political career in which she has expressed an interest she will be keeping up an extraordinary family tradition.

The Koirala family has produced three prime ministers. M P Koirala was the first commoner to become Prime Minister; B P Koirala, more respected as a novelist than as a politician, was ousted by King Mahendra, the present monarch's father, in a royal coup in 1960; and G P Koirala has been at the helm on and off since 1991. The three brothers had the same father but different mothers.

The author is the former editor of 'The Independent' in Kathmandu. He now reports for the 'Asia Wall Street Journal' and 'Khaleef Times'.

Lest We Forget M A Mohaimen: Blend of Courage and Conscience

by Tabarak Husain

THE grief shared by us all who knew him at his passing away was the best tribute we could pay to M A Mohaimen. His was a life full of spirit, busy with works in which he always sought to do something meaningful to benefit humanity.

In a material sense he achieved much success. This was not the bequest of inheritance. It was the just reward of his persevering efforts, reinforced by a keen perception of judging business affairs. Press and publications, his primary arena of business, proved for him to be intellectually satisfying, besides bringing repute and material benefits.

His relentless activities exacted a price through affecting his health. Though the nature of his affliction remained a persistent threat, the pace of his work, largely in social and intellectual fields, continued unabated. His habit of moving around the city to see his friends and well-wishers was characterised by continued renewal of his pledge of loyalty to them.

Any testimonial to Mr Mohaimen should begin with a reference to his remarkable courage. It was a courage which admitted no hesitation in exposing injustice, it was a courage to act in defiance of fear of consequences, it was a courage to publicly admonish and if necessary, to part with friends. In short, it was courage dictated by conscience. In defence of his beliefs he used his powerful pen and devoted much of his time and resources. He would rather lose his party than his faith.

This was well-illustrated by his own role in party politics. As a Muslim Leaguer he worked for the movement for the creation of Pakistan, a homeland for the Muslims who suffered discrimination. In the newly created state of Pakistan he was

disenchanted with the narrow communal politics of the Muslim League leaders and disassociated himself from that party. He found the progressive, secular ideals of the Awami League more in line with his beliefs. He played a significant role in the Language Movement and the Liberation Struggle.

Mr Mohaimen was however disillusioned by the trend of policies and events in post-liberation Bangladesh and publicly voiced his criticism. In his writings he exposed the pretensions and hypocrisy of some old-timer politicians. He assessed with objectivity many events of the liberation struggle. These actions drew criticism by some and evoked admiration of others. He continued to remain unaffected by all this. His alienation from the party was unavoidable.

As a writer he was quite prolific. His writings combined elements of realism and human compassion. It was known that many of his short stories originated from his personal experience and were not figments of his imagination. His story of a cat, meeting a bizarre end, was quite unforgettable. How a poor official's honesty triumphed over temptation was the theme of another of his memorable stories. The official, a refugee in

1948 from UP in India, refused Mr Mohaimen's friend's offer of financial assistance in exchange for a small favour. The official explained that while migrating from UP he had lost everything. Only his "Iman" remained. He could never sacrifice it. There was a touching poignancy in the ever so simple a human reaction.

One of Mr Mohaimen's last writings was on the role of Mr Mohd Ali Jinnah, founder of Pakistan, in Indian politics. Mr Mohaimen explained that one of the reasons for his decision to write about Mr Jinnah — a staunch Congressman for many years but later disillusioned — was that in recent years there has been re-evaluation of Mr Jinnah's role in the Indian press and publications.

With a broad and liberal outlook, Mr Mohaimen combined a strong sense of nationalism. There were numerous occasions in meetings and seminars when he strongly defended the interests of Bangladesh. He was, for example, much troubled by and even resentful about the discrimination by traders in Calcutta against Bangladesh books and publications.

It was a great misfortune that Mr Mohaimen's life was cut short before the society and the country could benefit from the full potential of his contributions. His bold and outspoken views on the ills of society and politics were a beacon of hope. He was deeply distressed by the dishonest and self-serving politics in the country. In his last years he moved away from active participation in politics and devoted himself to writing and discussing with a view to rousing public consciousness about the evils that beset our society. We mourn his loss and pray that his soul rests in eternal peace.

The author is a former Foreign Secretary.

